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November1995

PENCILS BY GEORGE PÉREZ

IBOTS

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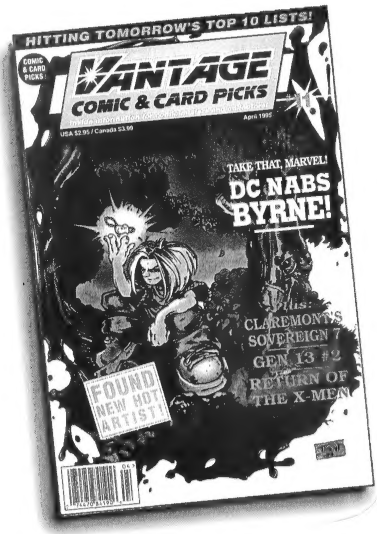

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VANTAGE™
COMIC & CARD PICKS
number 00

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Special thanks to our advisors!

Vantage Comic & Card Picks
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TOP PICKS OF THE MONTH

Snowman #1-up (Hall of Heroes / New Independent Artist)

Sensational Spider-Man #0-up (Marvel / Spider-Man family / New Dan Jurgens title)

Web of Scarlet Spider #1-up (Marvel / New Spider-Man, New Spider-title, low print run)

MORE VANTAGE PICKS

DC Special Series #27 (DC / Batman vs. The Incredible Hulk treasury back-issue)

Dragon Dice (TSR / engineered to spread)

Guy Gardner: Warrior #38 (DC / New female character)

Mantra #1-up (Malibu / Ultraverse / New female character descriptions sound interesting)

Marvel and DC Present #1 (Marvel and DC / X-Men and Teen Titan Team-up)

Marvel Overpower Cards (Marvel / Similar to Magic, easy to learn, crossover coming)

Marvel Treasury Edition #28 (Marvel / Spider-Man vs. Superman back-issue)

Prophet #2, Miller variant (Image / Extreme / Miller variant cover)

Sovereign Seven Annual #1 (DC / Early, low-print Sovereign Seven)

WATCH FOR THE VANTAGE STAR INDICATING OUR TOP PICKS!

Vantage is opposed to speculation, which we define as the purchase of comics by a fan solely for the purpose of selling quickly to others. The difficulty in speculating is that the comic market fluctuates quickly and dealers will not pay full market value for your books even when they do go up (they have to resell them). Vantage is intended for use by 1) Retailers 2) Show dealers 3) Fans who buy comics mainly for reading, but who also have an interest in the marketplace.

- Publisher Rob Golub

THE INDUSTRY GETS SEXUAL

In August Calvin Klein canceled an ongoing commercial advertising campaign after severe criticism had been leveled at the sexuality of the ads. In fact, the company took out a full page ad in the New York Times to explain that it had not expected the backlash. And why should they have? Fashion ads have been oozing sexuality for years. But this campaign was different — it involved children. For many people, Calvin Klein had finally crossed the line.

If Calvin Klein is not sure where the line is, the company may have something in common with today's comic publishers. In an effort to boost sales, the industry is growing increasingly sexual, and sexuality is growing increasingly mainstream. As a group, we seem to be moving closer to pornography, and I have witnessed little to no discussion about the moral or political ramifications.

Malibu, for example, now promotes Mantra as "sexy" and "teenage" in the same breath. High Impact Studios, perhaps the most successful new small publisher of 1995, relies heavily on sexuality to move books. Lightning Comics solicits "Nude" editions that might not have made it into the mainstream catalogs at one time, and sexy Gen 13 continues to be one of the top three books in the industry today. **Vantage** published a controversial Hellina/Double Impact cover.

The trend is to go bolder, wilder, and even more controversial. But as our male-dominated industry moves forward towards an even badder "bad girl," the outside world's sensibilities remain the same. In other words, if and when the industry crosses the line (if we haven't already), we may not even realize it. But if the rest of the world does, it won't be pretty.

– Rob Golub
Publisher

TEKNO CELEBRATES ONE YEAR

WITH A DEVOTED FAN-FOLLOWING AND A STRONG MARKETING PROGRAM!

Tekno Comix, at first besieged by some naysayers who thought they'd go the way of Defiant, has established a seemingly permanent market for itself.

Retailers report that the same customers continue to walk through the door and pick up Tekno books, and that others continue to make the occasional purchase. The consensus is that Tekno does indeed have its own following.

It was **Vantage** that went out on a limb and predicted that Tekno was for-real before even the first book was published. Now, Tekno's low runs and powerful marketing continue to make it one to watch.

In celebration of Tekno's first year anniversary, all titles shipping in November will be polybagged and contain one free copy of a Tekno back-issue. Also, for each title, one out of every ten of the free polybagged comics will be a gold plate-signed book. A high-end print of the creator's signature will appear on the book (e.g., Leonard Nimoy, Neil Gaiman, or Majel Roddenberry).

Tekno sources say future push will focus on the following points:

1) **Leonard Nimoy's Primortals: Origins** #1 and #2 in November and December features the long-awaited origin of the Primortals. This special origins mini is co-ploted by creator Leonard Nimoy. Is humanity ready for the shocking truth behind these creatures?

2) **Micky Spillane's Mike Danger** #7 begins a new arc written by series co-creator Max Allen Collins and pencilled by Peter Grau, with covers by comics perennial Walt Simonson. Mike takes a look back and remembers that, even before becoming trapped in the 21st Century, his adventures were anything but ordinary.

3) Although **Neil Gaiman's Teknophage** is only up to #7, he is technically the oldest character in the Tekno mythos, appearing in the first panel of **Mr. Hero** #1. His second story arc examines faith and religion on the bleak world of Kalighoul.

4) Tekno has launched forums on Prodigy, Compuserve, and more recently, the Microsoft Network. Look for more information on Tekno's big push online in Vantage's Starship Online Magazine, launching in 1996.

> The consensus is that Tekno does indeed have its own following.

Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero™ & © 1995 BIG Entertainment

THE "NEXT" CREED?

THE ARTIST THAT BEAT CREED'S TRENT KANIUGA WILL NOW PUBLISH HIS OWN COMIC!

New artist Matthew Martin once beat his High School buddy Trent Kaniuga (**Creed**) in a comic store art contest. He now launches his new creator-owned comic, **Snowman.**

Creed is the powerhouse hit that's now slapped all over Wizard™ and other mags. **Vantage** had predicted that **Creed** would go far almost before momma Kaniuga had ever heard of the darn thing.

Although Lightning Comics now publishes **Creed,** it is small publisher Hall of Heroes that first discovered Creed's creator, Trent Kaniuga. Back when Kaniuga and Matthew Martin were High School friends, Martin had heard about an art contest at a local comic shop and coaxed his friend to enter with him. Six people entered the contest, and comic store customers voted on their favorites. Trent Kaniuga proudly took second place, but it was his friend Matthew Martin who took first place.

Eventually, the comic shop owner started Hall of Heroes to publish comics by the two high school artists. After a few books, Kaniuga was picked up by Lightning and Martin took some time off from comics. Meanwhile, Hall of Heroes discovered yet another rising star, Ethan Van Sciver. Van Sciver created Cyberfrog for Hall of Heroes, which was eventually picked up by Harris.

Now, with a growing reputation for discovering blockbuster talent, Hall of Heroes is to publish a comic book from the man who beat Kaniuga in that original comic store contest. Martin leaves behind his litany of backup stories to finally produce a creator-owned comic book series. The series, called **Snowman,** is beautifully rendered. The cover to the first issue (which is on our cover, though it may be recolored for **Snowman** #1) is drop-dead gorgeous, and the story is entertaining.

One cold night in Elkhart, Indiana, Martin's cousin asked him, "Wouldn't it be cool if the snow came alive and killed us?" It was from that sentence that Snowman was born — a monster that rises up from the snow to kill with efficient callousness. The book has a horror edge to it. "I didn't consider it horror, but people say it is, so I guess it is," said Martin.

The book has been a long work in progress. "I've had half the book done for over a year." Only after Publisher Alan Stewart pleaded with him did Martin agree to complete **Snowman** for publication. Why the delay? "I wasn't sure anyone would like it," Martin admitted, "because it wasn't a Superhero book." In the end, fellow artist Ethan Van Sciver convinced Martin to go ahead with publication. "He talked me into it."

Martin and Kaniuga are still good friends. They exchange pin-ups, help each other out in a pinch, and now Martin will be doing some cards for Kaniuga's upcoming **Creed** trading card set. Martin is even doing a variant cover for Lightning's new original **Creed #1.**

Meanwhile, Hall of Heroes publisher Alan Stewart can't get over the fact that Kaniuga and Martin were high school friends, and yet coincidentally both so talented. "It's really odd," he remarked. Martin agreed, "It is kind of strange."

Snowman #1 will most likely be bimonthly, with the first issue shipping in December. Expect a black-and-white interior, a full-color cover, and a $2.50 cover price.

KKKOOOM
THIS TOWN'S GOT NOT ENOUGH TO TAKE THE LOSS OF ANOTHER CITIZEN... WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE ANY MORE TO THIS!
THAT TOWN ALONE HAS LOST OVER TWENTY PEOPLE THIS WINTER!
IT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME!
PEOPLE!
SOME HAVE NO LEGROOM BECAUSE OF SNOW.
SOME HAVE NO HEADROOM BECAUSE OF SNOW.
THERE'S NO ROOM AT ALL BECAUSE OF SNOW.
SNOW!! OF COURSE, WE KNOW ONLY A TEENIE OF SNOW.

NEW SPIDER-MAN TITLE

Marvel is launching a new ongoing Spider-title, a truly important event in comic book history. Only a handful of ongoing Spider-Man titles have been launched in thirty years of Spider-history.

Long-term investors who are sometimes wary of hot books may wish to take a second look here. Spider-launches have always done well. Even the tremendously over-printed **Spider-Man #1**, now canceled, will generally go for better than cover price.

The $4.95 (!) cover price on **Sensational Spider-Man #0** will greatly discourage speculators, and circulation should not be excessively high. The book will either take off immediately, or it will languish for some time in the three to five dollar range. A serious drop is unlikely. In any case, as long as the book is not prematurely canceled (Marvel does call the series "ongoing") **Sensational Spider-Man #0** will likely start to gain value at a rate far beyond inflation. **Web #1** goes for fifteen bucks or so, and **Spectacular #1** won't move for less than twenty-five. We can't guarantee you'll be able to send your kids to Harvard on this one, but it does seem like a book worth bagging and boarding.

And, hey, did we mention Dan Jurgens writes and draws this thing (we hear he's signed up for the long haul), that Spidey/Ben gets a new costume (again?), and that the cover will be lenticular? Lenticular means it turns into a pony and runs around your room screaming, "Jurgens is god! And Marvel's got him!" Just kidding. Actually Lenticular means the image changes when the cover moves. Or something.

Spider-Man™ & © 1998 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

WEB OF SCARLET SPIDER

Well, low and behold, without warning, this book appears to have become a regular series. Featuring a third **Spider-Man** (not Ben, not Peter), **Web of Scarlet Spider #1** now seems to qualify as a **Spider-Man #1** too. Much of the logic above applies here too, except for that numbers should be low (like **X-Man #1**) since no one knew it would be a regular series and that demand may be lower since this is really just a Spider-spin-off.

Why Launch With a Number 0?

The Sensational Spider-Man launches with a #0. This zero stuff is a growing trend for comic publishers. Even Vantage is getting into the act, by launching our upcoming Starship Online Magazine with a #0 issue. Why start off with a zero? Simple economics, my dear Watson. You see, once you know what your first issue sells, you can extrapolate what the second issue, third issue, other circulation numbers will be like thereafter.

It's a simple formula that's not perfect, and it may vary from publisher to publisher, but its usually pretty darn accurate. Vantage has heard it called the 100/60/40 rule. If your number one sells 100,000 copies, your #2 will sell about 60,000, and your #3 will sell 40,000. If your product is strong, you'll hopefully stay at 40,000. If you get really lucky, your product will grow in circulation, but that's the exception rather than the rule. A number zero sells much like a number one, so the publisher has two publishing schedules to chose from:

Circulation Without #0		Circulation With #0	
#1	100,000	#0	100,000
#2	60,000	#1	100,000
#3	40,000	#2	60,000
#4	40,000	#3	40,000
Total	240,000		300,000

The publisher who doesn't print a #0 sells sixty thousand fewer books over a four month period. If net revenue is a dollar a book, that's a loss of $60,000. So when fans ask why all the special editions, the answer is simple. Because the fans buy them, and because as silly as they may seem, they have forreal business consequences. If you were a publisher, and sixty grand was on the line, would you launch with a number zero or a number one?

WHAT WILL BE THE NEXT HOT THING?

As Magic: The Gathering starts to plateau in the collectors market, the talk among publishers and dealers has turned to a single subject (other than distributor stuff) ... what will the next hot thing be? Insiders seem to feel confident (or hopeful) that something will heat up for comic stores, to replace Magic: The Gathering, Bad Girls, or other items should they falter. There are several possibilities ...

1) The New Black-and-White boom. Collectors are increasingly turning their attention to small press comics. With so many titles now available from so many established publishers, mainstream titles just don't perform in the market like they used to. The market has instead turned its attention to the tiny print runs offered by small publishers. Trent Kaniuga's **Creed** may not only be a bold new step for Trent, but also a bold new step for the comic collectors market. When/if **Creed** hits the top ten lists, look for collectors to begin scratching their heads wondering which small press comic will become the next **Creed.** That will be the spark that starts the fire for up-and-coming artists from tiny publishers. Hopefully, the Marvel/DC crossover won't distract fans to the point of putting out the spark before the fire gets started.

2) Star Wars. Already hot, this could easily get hotter. The re-release of the original trilogy in THX quality is a but a minor improvement, but stores are reporting quick sell-outs. Some stores are even keeping waiting lists. The coming re-release of the original Star Wars and the coming new Star Wars movie could together make Star Wars even hotter.

3) Manga. Japanese-style comics have been growing in popularity and are also growing increasingly mainstream. MTV's recent entry into the Manga market with its new animated series Aeon Flux is but a sign of the times. Manga will be a major thrust for Capital City, thanks to its exclusive deal with Viz. Since TSR can still reach comic shops through gaming distributors, Viz may still be Capital's most valuable exclusive thus far. Look for Capital to push Viz in a big way, while Diamond continues to promote the manga that they carry.

4) Dragon Dice. TSR's Dragon Dice, introduced amid much hoopla at Gen Con, didn't get the kind of attention from the fans that even Spellfire did last year. But the people who played it seemed to really enjoy it, and this is a game that's been engineered to grow like a virus. Much like Magic: The Gathering, the dice in Dragon Dice are collectible. That is, you buy individual dice to add to your collection, hoping you'll be able to find the rarer, more powerful ones. Although comic stores are generally staying away from Dragon Dice thus far, this entertaining game could be a sleeper hit down the road.

> There are several possibilities

5) Crossovers. Everybody's doing it. Small publishers are doing it, Marvel and DC are doing it, heck, maybe even Vantage will figure out some wacky crossover as well. (**Starship Online** vs. **Vantage Comic & Card Picks** ... yeah ... that's the ticket). We would guess that Image and Dark Horse will consider doing it. Fans could easily get into a crossover mood — or they could get really sick of 'em.

6) Marvel Overpower. Some retailers have been reporting strong positive response to the Marvel Overpower collectible card game (and others say it's lukewarm). Some of the starter packs are rarer than others, and some retailers have been charging more for the rare ones. Starter packs usually go for around eight dollars, and the rare ones go for twelve dollars or more. Fans who have played the game seem to enjoy it, and the game is pretty easy to learn. Also, the Marvel/DC crossover could potentially draw fans away from "bad girls" and such — back to Marvel and DC's meat and potatoes characters. In other worlds, the Marvel/DC crossover could give Marvel Overpower a nice big push forward.

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CAPITAL CITY LAYS OFF 86, CLOSES MOST WAREHOUSES

DISTRIBUTOR REMAINS DEFIANT, PREPARES TO GROW "BIGGER THAN HEROES WORLD AND DIAMOND"

Capital City is completing its downsizing, having laid off 86 employees, and having closed all warehouses but three.

Of the 103 employees affected by the service center closures, 17 were transferred to new positions with Capital. The remaining 86 were laid off. "We'll miss a lot of old friends that have been Capitalistas for many years, It hurts to see them go," Griepp said. "The good news is that the costs saved will help Capital survive in the new environment."

Over the last three months, Capital closed all but two of its U.S. service centers, which they say has eliminated the cost of double handling products. The Sparta, IL and Garden City, NY centers remain open. To streamline its operations and help reduce shipping time to retailers, Capital is hooking up most if its customers to Capital Direct, a service which ships products directly to the retailer from the company's automated distribution centers in Illinois or New York.

Capital's Milton Griepp remains defiant, "The restructuring will enable Capital to maintain its guarantee of 1-2 day delivery and help prepare for the day when we are bigger than Heroes World and Diamond ... combined!"

CAPITAL REPOSITIONS ITSELF

Capital has redefined itself, pointing towards five key areas as its strengths...

1) Capital's new flat pricing policy. No matter how much you order, you get the same discount. Retailers seem to like the idea.
2) The company's selection of games.
3) Star Wars and Star Trek merchandise.
4) Anime and Manga selection.
5) Entertainment and sports cards.

Logo™ & © 1995 Capital City

how do dealers know what's hot before i do?

VANTAGE
COMIC & CARD PICKS

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMIC DEALERS AND SERIOUS COLLECTORS!

THE MOTHER OF ALL CROSSOVERS

HOW WILL FANS RESPOND TO A ZILLION MARVEL AND DC BATTLES WHERE THEY CAN VOTE ON THE OUTCOME?

Marvel and DC have undertaken the unprecedented step of planning the biggest crossover in history, involving the joining of universes, where fans will vote at their local comic shop to decide the outcomes of various superhero battles.

Marvel and DC have occasionally banded together for a short crossover — even more so recently. Now, for the first time, the Marvel and DC universes will cross over several characters at once in what Vantage has learned could turn out to involve both universes in a Zero Hour style event.

The four issue crossover is said to consist of a **DC vs. Marvel** #1 and #4 from DC and from Marvel a **Marvel vs. DC** #2 and #3 — *possibly* followed up by an even bigger crossover involving hundreds of Marvel and DC comics!

In the four-issue **DC vs. Marvel / Marvel vs. DC** mini, two immensely powerful entities fracture the fragile wall that separates the Marvel and DC universes. (So much for DC's policy of no alternate universes, eh?) In the first two issues of this historic saga, heroes and villains enter each other's realities. That is, DC and Marvel characters visit each other's universes in large numbers!

Powerful beings begin a chess game to see which universe is more powerful and they encourage battles between Marvel and DC characters to settle the issue. The characters become pawns against each other in contests of will and power throughout the four issue mini.

Look for **DC vs. Marvel** #1 from DC/Diamond in November, followed by **Marvel vs. DC** #2 from Marvel /Heroes World in January. Then in February and March look for #3 from **Marvel/ Heroes World** and #4 from **DC/ Diamond** respectively. It looks to **Vantage** like DC gets the best-selling issue numbers — #1 and the final issue, #4 — because Marvel-owned SkyBox does the cards. But that's just speculation.

Vantage hears that the following battles have been scheduled for **DC vs. Marvel #1** and **Marvel vs. DC** #2. There should also be others.

Flash vs. Quicksilver
Thor vs. Shazam
Robin vs. Jubilee
Submariner vs. Aquaman
Green Lantern vs. Silver Surfer (a rematch!)
Elektra vs. Catwoman

Issue #3 starts to really heat things up by getting "major" characters involved. The battles scheduled are:

Batman vs. Captain America
Hulk vs. Superman
Superboy vs. Spider-Man
Wonder Woman vs. Storm
Wolverine vs. Lobo

You may have noticed that while #2-4 come out in 1996, #1 comes out much earlier in November of 1995. That's to give time for the voting — which may be the most creative and, yes, the most brilliant part of this marketing scheme. The voting process will decide which Marvel and DC heroes win or lose in the later months of the mini!

It goes like this. Around November or so, a half million sixteen-page preview comics will be distributed at stores. Each

Silver Surfer™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Aquaman™ & © 1995 DC Comics

one will come with a ballot. You'll also be able to get ballots in **Wizard**™, from retailers, from your grandma, or anywhere else you could possibly think of. They will be everywhere.

Every store will receive a balloting kit that will allow it to become a polling place. Fans will be able to hand in their ballots at the local shops, voting for who they think should win the big battles at the end of the mini-series. It seems that fans will at least get to see #1, to get them excited about the whole thing, before they have to turn in their ballots.

It is after the mini series winds down that our sources start to become a bit fuzzier. Here are some of the rumors Vantage has heard for what happens towards the end of the mini or after it is over ... (1) DC and Marvel may trade some characters! (2) DC and/or Marvel may have a Zero Hour-style event where every title somehow gets involved in all of this for two months — over 100 comic books from DC and Marvel involved!

Creators involved in this project are said to include Ron Marz, Peter David, and Dan Jurgens.

At first glance, this promotion looks like a success in the making. The balloting and the historical importance of this event will surely get even the most cynical of fans at least a little excited. The fans that still aren't completely jaded will likely scoop this stuff right up.

Marvel and DC will hopefully spin this thing properly to the national press — unprecedented battles between heroes like Superman and the Hulk were previously near-impossible since the heroes are owned by competitors....which raises the question, in this incredibly competitive environment, why is this happening? Why are Marvel and DC cooperating in what experts agree is a very dog-eat-dog period for the comic book industry. It's all about money, folks. Zero Hour and Age of Apocalypse made big money, and this is about the only thing Marvel or DC can do that's potentially bigger. It is ironic that after so much industry in-fighting, Marvel, DC, Heroes World, and Diamond will all need to cooperate to pull this thing off.

For the back-issue market, **Vantage** expects fans to become curious about past crossovers. Old crossover comics — even treasuries — that can't move at guide may suddenly start to fly even if priced well over guide. Dig up those old, tattered Superman vs. Spider-Man and Hulk vs. Batman treasuries and put them on your show table or counter with a sign that reads, "The Original Marvel/DC Crossovers!" They'll move.

Prime™ & © 1995 Malibu Entertainment Group, Inc.

IMAGE AND MALIBU GET LEFT OUT

Image Comics and Marvel's Malibu do not appear to be participating in the Marvel/DC crossover. Image is aware of the situation and is planning for it. "We are examining all information we are getting at this point and we will definitely counter this," said Matt Hawkins of Extreme Studios.

Malibu is going to try and cash in on the excitement by reprinting some Marvel/Malibu crossovers that had been available only through American Entertainment for ten to forty bucks apiece by way of mail order only. Look for X-Men/Exiles, Wolverine/Night Man, and Hulk/Prime to be re-presented in a single $6.95 book. Vantage admits to never having read the books — okay, we admit that we would like to read 'em. So? We are comic fans, ya know. The reprints will show up in your local shop in — what a coincidence — November, the first month of the Marvel/DC crossover.

WORLD'S FIRST MAGAZINE FOR COMICS FANS WHO USE THE INTERNET

The world's first magazine for comics fans who want to know what's hot online launches in January, brought to you by the makers of Vantage Comic & Card Picks Magazine.

This paper magazine called **Starship Online** will be devoted to exploring online areas that relate to comic books and fandom. For example, articles will appear covering the DC Comics area on America Online, various Star Wars Internet "home page" areas, and E-Mail interviews with well-known comic book creators. In-store surveys conducted by Vantage have shown that one out of four comic book store shoppers now accesses the Internet!

"This growing niche market is practically begging for more attention from the comic book industry," said Publisher Rob Golub. "This is the most exciting thing that I have ever been involved in. When I work on the publication with our freelancers, even with our [illegible] Jones, there's this feeling of nervous excitement. It's like everyone knows we're doing something historic, something special."

The Internet is the fastest growing segment of world media. Experts predict that the Internet will grow into an information superhighway that's so big and useful, even if you're one of those people who thinks every mouse eats cheese, you'll probably be a regular user before you know it. Now the phenomenon of the century is brought together with the watch's world of comics in this cutting-edge magazine — finally, an exciting new *growth-oriented* product for the comics market!

Starship Online will recognize the fact that its readers will be beginners. It will contain regular "beginners" columns. "We want to make this a magazine for everybody, even people who have never used the Internet but are just curious," said Golub.

Retailers are responding to the launch with real enthusiasm. "Well I can already tell you that I will be selling quite a few of your new mag Starship Online," said John Hunter, Owner of Planet Comics, Oklahoma City, OK, after being told of Starship Online's launch in January. "We already have a HUGE customer base of modemers to pull from."

Starship Online is backed up by an aggressive retailer incentive program, a sales-oriented three-issue contest, advertising in Entity Comics and other publishers' comics, and a bizarre "fortune cookie" promotion that involves cookies sent to distributors with fortunes that read, "Starship Online Magazine / Shipping In January / Retailers Will Make A Fortune!"

HERE COME THE MICRO-DISTRIBUTORS

Have a beer. Have a distributor.

You may have heard of the new trend in beer — micro-breweries. These little beer breweries churn out their own beer, under their own labels. Even though they're smaller, without the resources of the larger companies, they have carved out a market by offering the advantages of smallness, such as a new taste or a down-home feel.

Micro-breweries have been popping up all over the nation with much success. So people don't always just "have a Bud" as the manufacturer would no doubt prefer — sometimes they just have a beer. Any beer. There are lots of little brands to chose from. And now, with the advent of micro-distributors for small press, you can have a distributor too.

Micro-distributors are generally companies that have followed the lead of the big boys, to a lesser extent. Diamond has an exclusive with DC, and Capital has one with TSR. Retailers who want to carry DC and TSR will have to order from Diamond and Capital; the same logic applies to micro-distributors who have found ways to create their own little exclusive arrangements.

The original micro-distributor, Comic Calvalcade, may have started it all, but the playing field no longer belongs to just them. Other micros now include Twin Distribution, which for example has a Lightning Comics exclusive available, and Vault of Comics which offers **Nira X** and others.

Greg Reece, owner of the Vault of Comics, purchased 3000 signed copies of **Nira X** from Entity Comics to start his micro-distribution business. The 3000 books had an exclusive variant cover — the only way to get this cover is from Vault of Comics. Period. Reece says that one of the advantages of offering exclusives is that it grabs people's attention and it allows him to increase his sales for non-exclusive items as well. Reece says that his exclusive Animal Mystic art print is bringing his company quite a bit of non-exclusive business.

Reece, who also operates the Vault of Comics as a shop, is thus far pleased with his micro-distributing business. "Micro-distributing is becoming a bigger and bigger part of our business," he said. Though the majority of sales are to fans, Reece wants to increasingly target comic shops. "I think we'll deal with more of them." Twin Comics Distribution, a micro-distributor based in Florida, also offers exclusives.

MALIBU WRITER SAYS HE IS UNFAIRLY "FIRED"

CLAIMS FINANCIAL RIGHTS TO MANTRA, SAYS OTHER FOUNDERS ARE DISGRUNTLED

Mantra writer and Ultraverse Founding Father Mike W. Barr says that he was "fired" by Malibu due to a legal dispute over creator rights.

Mike W. Barr, who has been writing Mantra since the beginning, says that Malibu has turned its back on his original understanding with the old owners. He says that he was to have a greater financial stake in Mantra than what he has actually been given.

"Be assured that my dismissal was not for creative or editorial reasons," said Barr, "the departure comes as the result of a unilateral decision by Malibu, arising from a contractual dispute which has been in progress since the founding of the Ultraverse in 1992." Though Barr is the first to go public, he says that other Ultraverse Founding Fathers are also disgruntled.

Barr says that at the first Ultraverse organizational meeting in 1992, the seven Ultraverse Founding Fathers were promised a "Character Agreement" that dealt with intellectual property issues. Since Barr and Malibu were unable to reach such an agreement, Barr's lawyer eventually began to add riders to Barr's contracts that retained certain rights to Mantra.

Barr says that previous management had no objection to the riders, but that current management has rejected them. When Malibu rejected the riders, according to Barr, they were essentially firing him. Malibu says that they rejected the riders, and the comic book scripts that they pertained to, because they retained the copyright to Mantra. Malibu insists that Barr was not fired, and that Malibu owns Mantra.

Malibu Senior Executive vice-president Gary Gittelsohn spoke out on the situation, "I think he's simply looking to sway public opinion in his favor. Mike is not giving the full picture. We have done just about everything we could do to try to resolve these issues. We do have a deal with Mike and the copyright in the property is owned by Malibu."

In fact, says Gittelsohn, most of the founders signed a Character Agreement that had also been offered to Barr, that Barr had declined to sign. Furthermore, Gittelsohn told Vantage that though there is no written contract, Barr has "financial participation" in Ultraverse characters for as long as the Ultraverse exists, that Malibu has been paying him, and that Malibu will continue to pay him. "We have other Founders who don't feel this way," added Gittelsohn.

Barr's lawyer says that Malibu has proposed "unreasonable terms," and that Barr "will feel free to pursue whatever options he deems warranted concerning the Mantra property." Barr says, however, that he and a Malibu official are still attempting to work together towards a friendly settlement.

"I regret that nearly three years of profitable creative service to Malibu have been so abruptly terminated," said Barr, "but I feel publishers cannot be permitted to renege on promises to creators, particularly creators who have brought to publishers properties which have proven profitable for them."

Malibu issued a statement insisting, "Mike Barr seeks to damage the enormous good will among creators which Malibu has worked hard to cultivate." Malibu added that it would have preferred to reserve comment, "on what should haven been a purely private matter."

Mantra™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc.

FIGHTING OVER MANTRA WON'T HOLD HER BACK

Malibu issued a statement as follows:

The good news is that while these behind-the-scenes difficulties are being worked out, we know that the fans come first. Malibu absolutely promises this doesn't change in any way Malibu's aggressive plans for Mantra. In the new Mantra series (#1, October, $1.50) Malibu will introduce seventeen-year-old "good girl," Lauren, who becomes Mantra. She's attractive, popular, and a super heroine — all for the first time in her life. How she handles it is spectacularly drawn by "good girl" artist Dave Roberts and will be written in story arc format by several different top writers including original Ultraverse founder Tom Mason. Other writers will be announced in the next couple of weeks. The stories will present the new Mantra as all teen, all girl, and very inexperienced — at everything.

X-FILES

THIRD SEASON EPISODE GUIDE!

These titles have been announced for season three episodes so far:

01 The Blessing Way (part 2 of 3)
02 Paper Clip (part 3 of 3)
03 D.P.O.
04 Clyde Bruckman's Final Response
05 The List
06 2Shy
07 The Walk
08 Oubliette

X-FILES CONVENTION UPDATE!

This is a list of upcoming convention dates and locations. For more information please call 818-409-0960, ext 225.

MIDWEST

Minneapolis Convention Center	12/3
Indianapolis Adam's Mark Hotel	11/19
Boise Center	11/5
Chicago	11/4

NORTHEAST

Secaucus Meadowlands Con Ctr	11/24
Boston Convention Center	10/29

SOUTHWEST

Austin Stouffers	11/19
Plano Park Plaza Hotel	10/29

CANADA

Vancouver Hyatt Regency	12/3

GILLIAN ANDERSON, WHAT A WOMAN!

Movieline calls her a "better actress than most of the women you see in movies." Anderson plays Special Agent Dana Scully, the rational agent who just won't buy Mulder's discoveries no matter how many X-Files episodes she's put behind her. Some people never learn, eh?

She's now one of TV's most popular actresses. Before X-Files, she was an award-winning off-Broadway actress, recipient of a Theater World Award for her performance in Alan Ayckborne's "The Philanthripist" in New York.

Born in Chicago, Anderson moved to London, England with her family when she was two. As a pre-teen she moved with her family back to the U.S. and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was there that she began acting at City High School and in community theater, where she developed a passion for the stage. After high school, she became an Ivy Leaguer, attending Cornell University, followed up by a stint in the theater program at Chicago's DePaul University. She's married and has one child. She and her family live and work in Vancouver.

WHO IS CHRIS CARTER?

Chris Carter invented The X-Files and he is also one of the main writers. Carter received a 1995 Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Writing in a Dramatic Series for the episode called Duane Barry. Carter developed the idea for X-Files as recently as 1992! Born and raised in southern California, he has been writing for most of his adult life. He has written several television movies.

TRIVIA CONTEST:
WIN AN X-FILES T-SHIRT AND POSTER

Give us the correct answer to the question below and you could be one of three people selected at random to win a free T-Shirt and poster. Cut out this box and mail in to Vantage X-Files, #110, 13000 W. Blue Mound Rd., Elm Grove, WI 53122

Where is the X-Files usually filmed? (there's a hint on this page!)

_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____

TRIVIA CONTEST:
WIN A SIGNED X-FILES COMIC

Give us the correct answer to the question below and you could be one of three people selected at random to win a free X-Files comic signed by Stefan Petrucha. Cut out this box and mail in to Vantage X-Files, #110, 13000 W. Blue Mound Rd., Elm Grove, WI 53122

What's in Arecibo, PR, that Scully visits in Little Green Men? (also seen in Species!)

_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____

signed limited

$3.95

ARE WE CRAZY???

comics you want...

VANTAGE *Signature Series*

SOVEREIGN SEVEN

number TWO

Sovereign Seven #2 introduces a major new character. Only the second appearance of Chris Claremont's brainchild, this piece of history can be yours for the seriously majorly totally cheap price of $9.95. As far as signature series go, this one's the place to be. See, Vantage has been holding this little sucker under its hat for just the right issue, and, well, here we are.

Vantage **has made special arrangements to subsidize the costs of producing signed comics — we are passing the savings on to you, our valued customers! Don't ever pay $30-$60 for a signed comic again! *Vantage Signature Series* comics are signed and strictly limited to unfathomably low quantities, and are truly affordable! The catch? There's two of 'em:**

1) **You must use the coupon provided– no copies.**
2) **If we receive over 3000 orders we will return checks at random (sorry, we have no choice)!**

OFFER EXPIRES DEC. 15, 1995.

☐ Yes, I'd like *Sovereign Seven #2*, personally signed by artist Dwayne Turner, limited to 3000 produced by Vantage, with accompanying certificate of authenticity! I understand that if Vantage receives orders for over 3000 copies, my coupon and money may be selected at random to be returned (I will receive a full refund).

Enclosed is $9.95 + $2.50 (shipping)= $12.45 total

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, & ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

Please send check or money order with this coupon (no copies) to:

Vantage Signature Series, Dept. S72
13000 W. Blue Mound Road, #110
Elm Grove, WI 53122

NON-SPORTS PICKS

THE X FILES

Something Borrowed, Something New

The release of this year's **Marvel Masterpiece** cards from Fleer got delayed somewhat so that the chromium X-Men cards could come out early, and something important may have resulted from the delay!

The card set is huge again, this time numbering 151 cards (sadly, a number that is not divisible by nine - don't these people ever put their cards in nine-pocket sheets?) Most of the set is made up of three each pictures of thirty-eight characters, meaning that we aren't scraping the bottom of the character barrel looking for characters to do. An additional 38 cards are included, one per character, and the good news is that only one card in the regular set is set aside for the 2099 characters that killed a few of the earlier sets (particularly the second Masterpiece set).

The real excitement, however, is going to come from the chase cards. Once again there is asignature set that parallels the regular set, but this time they are 24-point stock with multi-foil coverings using the E-Motion process that proved so popular with sports cards earlier this year. There have always been collectors who built the autograph set, but Vantage expects that this time there will be a lot more of them because the cards are so inherently different from the normal cards (even at one per pack it takes all the E-Motion cards from more than four boxes to complete a set).

Bishop ™ & © 1995 Marvel Ent. Group, Inc.

VANTAGE Card Picks

Marvel Masterpiece 1995
Star Wars Galaxy III
Coke Metal Card Set

Every other pack will have a canvas card, which should really look more like painted cards - be sure to check and see if the packs with these cards "feel" different from the other packs (remember the **Vantage** guide to finding chase cards?) The eight HoloFlash chase cards feature villains, and are inserted at a rate of only one per twelve packs, so you can expect these puppies to fetch a pretty penny.

Now how much would you pay? Wait, before you answer, there's more. As you may know by now, Marvel not only owns Fleer, but it bought Skybox as well. Remember the **Lion King** series one Lenticular chase cards? They hit the streets running at $35 each and never looked back. Sure, Fleer got the process to make these cards from Skybox, and they've included two in this set (one X-Men card and one less-sought-after Avengers card). The real news is that they finally got a message from Skybox that **Vantage** has hoped for - the lenticular chase cards will be inserted at a rate of one per ten boxes. Expect the Avengers card to start out at $35 and the X-Men card to command $50 or more from day one. If you are a completist, you will be wise to find these cards before the prices start to climb. **Vantage** wishes the insertion rate was more reasonable (one in three boxes would be kinder to younger collectors), but there's no doubt that a pair of important cards are in these boxes.

Take Three

Who would have expected that a trio of movies from several decades ago could have spawned such an ongoing supply of materials for sale? The **Star Wars Galaxy Three** cards from Topps are due out, and fans are already lining up for them. The basic set is smaller this time, only 90 cards, but there are four chase card sets instead of only one. The most important set is the six etched-foil cards from Walter Simonson which connect to the chase cards from the first two Galaxy collections, but some fans will be more interested in the clearchrome cards done by Image Comics artists (the J. Scott Campbell card is likely to generate the most demand due to his work on Gen 13). First Day cards are inserted at a rate of one per pack, and are a parallel set to the basic cards (this was done with **Mars Attacks**, but this time the insertion rate is much better). Finally, there are twelve more foil-stamped cards which feature artwork from the LucasArts video games (**Vantage** doesn't expect much interest in these cards except by completists). The large number of chase cards is offset slightly by the fact that there are two in every pack, but these cards are likely to overshadow all the non-comic cards released this month.

The Star Wars Galaxy Three cards from Topps are due out... The most important set is the six etched foil cards from Walt Simonson which connect to the chase cards from the first two Galaxy collections.

The Frost That Refreshes

While we may have seen the last of the normal **Coca-Cola** trading cards with the fourth set, we've clearly barely brushed the surface of what is possible: this month Metallic Images is bringing out the **Coke Metal Card** set. This ten card set will retail for about $25, and features everybody's favorite polar bears with the beverage that seems to have caught their appetites. The print run on these boxes will be somewhat smaller than Vantage would expect (19,900 is the total run), so they may disappear to collectors' closets quicker than most sets.

The Artwork Is Out There

Any comic store is painfully aware that they ordered too few copies of the early **X-Files** comics, and the demand from fans of the Fox television show has continued unabated. Following up the framesize **Star Wars** cards from last month, Topps has announced the release of the **X-Files Mastervisions** cards. These cards are 6.5 inches by about 10 inches, and feature the artwork from

the comics (sorry folks, no photographs of the stars). While a set of the cards is priced at about $40, **Vantage** expects some dealers will have more luck selling some of the cards as singles (particularly if they vary prices on the cards, pricing the better ones between $3 and $5 and the less important cards closer to a dollar).

Don't Forget the Kitchen Sink

Skybox is taking no chances with the release of the **Star Trek Voyager II** cards - they're hoping that whatever you collect there will something for you in the packs. Sure, the regular 110 cards will irritate dealers everywhere who can't get them into the normal 100 count boxes, but fans are rewarded with a 9-card Timeline mural that probably won't look right in a nine-card sheet. Neelix's recipe cards are inserted, and they actually feature scratch and sniff technology (but careful! The cards aren't mint once they've been scratched!). The spectra-etch chase cards feature aliens the crew has met, and there is also a rare SkyMotion card (most likely a redemption card, though).

Not enough? They've thoughtfully included a temporary tattoo in every pack. No, really - scratch and sniff AND tattoos. Now, if they'd only include a roadmap to shortcuts of the galaxy so the crew could find their way home.

Superman ™ & © 1995 DC Comics

each card seems to be taken up with the name of the character, the DC logo, and the phrase LEGENDS '95. Wouldn't artwork look better? You can always put the names on the BACK of the cards. The chase sets look better, and include four different sets, but are still no more common

We Don't Need No Stinking Art

Not to be left out of the chromium card race, Skybox is bringing out the **Power Chrome: DC Legends 95** cards, perhaps as a result of their new association with Fleer. The card set is unnecessarily large (can you name 162 DC characters you'd like to see on cards?) but what really worries **Vantage** is the promo art that's been shown: a significant portion of

Star Trek Voyager ™ & © 1975, 1995 Paramount

than every other pack. If you really want to collect this set, you might follow **Vantage's** example and wait a few months until the price per box comes down.

Speculative Corner

Hey, Hey - It's the **Monkees!** A generation of now aging kids grew up watching them every week, and one of the biggest surprises of the eighties was the comeback they made when MTV

Chris Foss Art ™ & © 1995 Chris Foss

started reshowing the original episodes.

Had these cards come out then, they would have been a massive hit; has time passed them by? Will dowdy women in their forties venture into comic stores to relive their youth? Will dealers order enough boxes of these cards, or will Cornerstone Communications have their first hit release of non-sports cards? Sure hope the box we open has one of the autograph cards!

Quick Notes

Wildstorm Productions just hates to see a month go by without another release, so this time we get the **Wetworks Chromium** trading cards. There are 107 cards in the basic set, and two nine card subsets: nine die-cut cards featuring the characters before and nine gold chromium cards featuring the characters after (if you have to ask before and after what, go back and read a comic or two!)

FPG has two normal-sized card releases coming at us. **Michael Kaluta**'s first set for FPG grabbed fans attention because of his Vampirella artwork, but the rest of the pictures proved to be even more impressive. His second set of cards should sell well to the fans who picked up his first set.

Chris Foss has worked as the designer for numerous genre films, and his **Fantasy Art** cards should help him find a wider audience for his work.

The **Stephen Hickman** cards from Comic Images features 90 cards that spotlight some of the paintings he has done for book covers, calendars, posters, etc., but the most highly-visible and recognizable cards will be the Man-Kzin Wars bookcovers that are used for the chase cards

M W Kaluta Art ™ & © 1995 M. W. Kaluta

Comic Images is also bringing out a set of cards that is actually images from comics! Their **Golden Age of Comics Chromium** card set will feature artwork from comics of the thirties and the forties, and is likely to wind up gathering dust with the Jack Kirby card set they issued a few months back.

COMICS ARE FOR READING First!

By Rick Keller

Halloween. The holiday where you could dress up like your favorite scary character. Characters like Dracula, Wolfman, Newt, and of course the scariest of all ~ Rush. Brrr. It gives me the chills just picturing the masks. Of course if you were one of those last minute people you would just grab a sheet, tie it around your neck and say you were Superman, Batman or whoever your favorite superhero was. But back then it didn't really matter. All that mattered was who had the most candy when you and your friends got together later in the evening. If you were really lucky the houses you went to would give you comic books as well. Nothing better than chowing down on your candy haul while reading the latest Justice League or Avengers comic. Well, as usual, times change. Costumes are so elaborate these days that you have to start preparing them November first. Going out at night through the local neighborhood? Unlikely, unless you have a police escort. And candy really doesn't taste the same when its been hermetically sealed. Oh well, we can reminisce about the good old days, can't we. So, in honor of this fine holiday **Vantage** presents reviews on some of the scariest heroes you'll ever see on the comic racks.

Batman will be fighting people like the Joker, Bane and the local mass murderer until they take him away to the cemetery.

Batman
Comics
DC Comics
prices vary

Batman © & © 1995 DC Comics

You know, I've been writing this column for 150 years now, give or take 149 of them, and this might possibly be the most difficult review to write. It's certainly not because I dislike the Batman family of comics, which includes **Batman, Detective Comics, Shadow of the**

This series spans many years of Knightmare's career, from when he was a brown-nosed superhero to a time in the post-apocalyptic future.

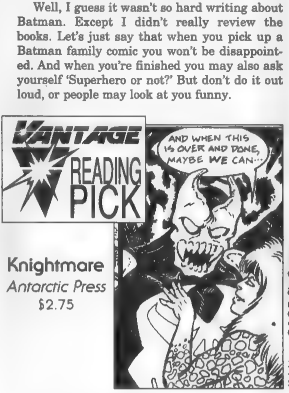
Bat, Batman Chronicles, and **Legends of the Bat.** I've picked up several of those titles during my lifetime. And it's certainly not the writing or the artwork: some of the greatest talents have presented the adventures of the Dark Knight and his trusty pal Robin. I think the reason I'm having trouble writing about this Bruce Wayne/Batman guy is because he has become, over his nearly sixty year presence, one of the most complicated comic book superheroes around.

Well, can we really say he's a superhero? Not in the superhuman sense. He doesn't have the ability to travel at faster than light speeds, he doesn't have a magic ring, and he doesn't have X-ray vision that will let him see through Vicki Vale's clothes. True, he does have a lot of fancy weapons to play around with, but those only enhance his abilities. However, if we were to consider his intellect, above average strength, and crime solving abilities as 'superhuman' then I guess he can be considered a superhero. We've always considered as super-heroes people like Flash, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, and Superman. Batman has been written, and I don't know if this was the original premise, as the total opposite of these types of heroes. **Superman** is a symbol of what's good in America: Mom, Apple Pie, and Chevrolet, and he tends to have a positive outlook on society. Batman on the other hand represents the world that is crumbling around us (at least that's what the newspapers tell me). He's brooding, depressed, feels that there will never be an end to the violence that surrounds him. In some ways he can be considered the antihero.

Yet, Superman and Batman have a lot in common. They're both dedicated to ridding the world of violence and the people who cause it. In many Batman stories he has been dedicated to the point of not getting any sleep. Supes and Bats also have one other big thing in common. Both of them have taken vows not to kill. However, during many times in his comic book career, Batman has come close with those in his Rouge's Gallery. So I guess that would make him a hero.

However, a hero should be able to separate his personal life from the one under the mask. Bruce Wayne/Batman can't do that. In fact, if he ever ridded the world of evil he probably wouldn't know what to do with himself. Could you really see an issue of Batman where he hangs up the cowl for a greeter position at Wal-Mart. Nah, didn't think so. He will never give up. Batman will be fighting people like the Joker, Bane, and the local mass murderer until they take him away to the cemetery. So I guess he could be considered a superhero.

Well, I guess it wasn't so hard writing about Batman. Except I didn't really review the books. Let's just say that when you pick up a Batman family comic you won't be disappointed. And when you're finished you may also ask yourself 'Superhero or not?' But don't do it out loud, or people may look at you funny.



Here's a situation I'm sure all you **Vantage** readers have encountered before: You're walking along the street, minding your own business. Suddenly, a beautiful women pulls up beside you, tells you to get into her car, and you are whisked away to the mansion of her multi-millionaire father. Her father has a second job as a superhero who causes fear in the hearts of

KNIGHTMARE
I'M DETAILING SOME WHEELS TURNING SO I'M NOT GOING TO DWELL ON THE DIALOGUE BALLOONS IN THIS PANEL!
HEY! THAT'S MELROSE PLACE!
I NEED YOUR HELP!
I'M NOT A DETECTIVE!
BUT I'M ON HER BEFORE I BE FIRED!
BUT I'M AFRAID IT'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL THE THIRD MY WIFE'S YOUR CHAMPION!
L.L.?
YES! I HAVE AN ASSIGNMENT FOR YOU, REJUVETYM!
WEDDING KNIGHT

men and women. He has been injured and wants you to take his place. You weigh your options, find out Melrose Place is a repeat that evening, and you decide to take his place.

Pretty much the way your days go, huh? Well, that's kind of the way it went for Gerry Keyes of Philadelphia as he became the hero Knightmare.

The book, written, drawn, inked, and handed directly to you on a silver platter by P. Sky Owens, was a six-issue series distributed by the Japanese Manga-maniacs over at Antarctic Press. It will soon be going over to London Press as a three-issue color mini-series, but it's best you pick up the original run now or you may have no idea what's going on. Why would this be, you ask? Because, die-hard **Vantage** reader, this series spans many years of Knightmare's career, from when he was a brown-nosed superhero to a time in the post-apocalyptic future (it's always post-apocalyptic, isn't it?) where he has become some type of spiritual leader. In between this time he also managed to marry his sidekick, Dreamshadow, who's the daughter of the former Knightmare. The guy leads a full life. This is one of the many heroes in comics who's been given a name and a costume but never really asked for it. But Owens hasn't done what others in the industry have done. There's no 12-part story revolving around the origins of the hero, his rotten childhood, the day he got Tinkertoys instead of a Big Wheel. He was very straightforward with what he wanted to do with Gerrold Keyes: put him out into the world and let him do his job. Owens also does a great sidebar story concerning the future of Earth and the second coming of Knightmare. It allows the reader a glimpse into the future of that hero and shows how much he has evolved. Now, whether it's an alternate future or not is anyone's guess. This is of course the cheap selling tactic used by Owens to promote his new mini-series. Well, it worked for me because I've already order 200 copies and the set of Ginsu knives that comes along with it.

So, there you have it. A superhero who marries his sidekick, a tradition of heroism, a future storyline. Combine them all together and you have one fine series by one fine independent talent. And who knows, maybe this sidekick marriage thing will spread (although, I don't think you'll see Batman proposing to Robin anytime soon).

DON'T LET THAT COSTUME GO TO YOUR HEAD! PHETRE'S STILL A LOT THAT YOU HAVE TO LEARN!
LIKE PATIENCE
...AND CAUTION.
BAM!
CAUTION IS IN SHARDS!
THIS OUTFIT IS BULLET PROOF!!!
WHAT CAN GO WRONG!!!

Knightmare © & ® 1995 P. Sky Owens

At the turn of the century there were a lot of companies that made a lot of money selling buggy whips. When the automobile came along, these companies didn't take much notice because they thought that they were in the buggy whip business.

They were wrong. The automobile quickly eliminated the need for horse-drawn wagons, and that eliminated the need for buggy whips. The error the companies made was assuming that they were in the buggy whip business: in actuality, they were in the transportation business. **Vantage** fears that many of today's comic book publishers are making a similar error ~ they *think* they're in the entertainment business, but they may not be.

Consider the cost of a typical comic book nowadays: a minimum of $1.95, with several special issues and special cover comics easily running $4 to $5. Let's compare this to the price of a movie ticket, something that is clearly entertainment and not a collectible. Assuming that a comic is typically read in about fifteen minutes, this translates into a cost of $14 to (!) $25 for the same amount of entertainment supplied by a movie. Ouch ~ no wonder so many fanboys stand around and breeze through several comics for free before buying a few.

Clearly a significant portion of the revenues of a comic book are coming from something other than entertainment. Several things come to mind.

Soft-Core Porn Fans

How many parents would allow their twelve-year-olds to buy a PG-13 version of **Playboy**? Or would like to find them with their **Victoria's Secret** catalog in the treehouse? Probably not many, and yet a quick glance at a lot of the comics produced lately shows the kind of material that would have shocked the early 1950s' comic foes who fought against the content of comics for kids, and cause a bit of a scandal today. Good girl art, bad girls, poses that most "Men's" magazines would be proud of, swimsuit issues, and even (sigh) lingerie issues are clearly in existence to show off the (idealized) female form rather than to tell a story. The industry has actually mined a market niche that wasn't previously filled already ~ soft-core porn in a format that is acceptable to most parents. While many women probably recognize (and resent) what is being sold, fans can explain that they're only buying it because of the artwork featuring their favorite artists or characters. Right.So this is not strictly entertainment, except of the high-hormone-level sort.

The Speculators

Spent much time watching QVC or similar channels and programs on cable television? If so, you are no doubt familiar with some of the comics-related items they offer: signed and numbered "limited" comics at vastly inflated prices, many by no-value creators. While most comic collectors might turn up their noses at these "bargains" due to the apparent worthlessness and high prices, many of them fall for the same scam in a slightly disguised form ~ variant covers. By releasing special books that appear once in groups of four, five, ten, twenty, or fifty regular comics publishing companies immediately establish a rare collectible that commands a briskly rising price (usually accompanied by rapidly

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escalating demand). This is even more successful when the limited edition books are not announced, and stores are forced to guess how many extra copies of a book to order in case a limited variant will be forthcoming. While this may not seem to directly profit the publishers, they can increase revenues by holding back and selling some of the variants directly to sub-distributors (a tactic that is clearly being used by some of the small publishers). It is also clear that the variant covers can lead to increased orders overall.

Many companies are also soliciting limited signed and numbered editions of their books (particularly their number one issues). This marketplace was created by independents who contracted with various artists and writers to create limited signed and numbered books, but many of the companies now produce and solicit these books themselves, eliminating the middleman and acquiring some of the profits of the secondary market.

Another common ploy now universally used is the mini-series. It is a well-established fact that stores order and customers buy more copies of a number one book than with subsequent issues of most ongoing series, so many companies have switched to producing one mini-series after another. This may actually hurt back-issue sales due to confusion on the part of collectors (anybody want to describe the myriad series of books that **Zen Intergalactic Ninja** has had or how to collect them?), but it is clearly a trend to be watched.

Let's face it, while the big speculators may be gone from comics, there are a lot of little speculators. First issues almost always sell better than subsequent issues, special cover enhancements sell better than non-enhanced books, and a substantial percentage of the collectors will not buy

newsstand editions of books even if they are sold at substantial discounts compared to the direct editions (this is especially prevalent for books from companies like Image where there is no UPC code on the covers of the direct editions). Many people buy comics because they think that the books will go up in value. They buy price guides every month to see how much money they've made, and are quite happy with their investment planning...until they try to sell their comics back to a store and get a dramatic reality check.

An odd side-effect of the investor mentality is that once recent comics start to go up in the price guides, there is an instant rush to obtain copies, putting more pressure on them – while the initial momentum may be started by people trying to collect the title, the real pressure comes from the speculators trying to pick up copies for later sale or trade (the inexpensive trade paperback copies of the **Lady Death** and **Gen 13** didn't really dent the back issue prices, indicating that the books are commanding high prices because of the speculators rather than those seeking entertainment). Speculators may not read, or may only scan the credits, on the way to resale. Certainly they are not buying entertainment.

> While the big speculators may be gone from comics, there are a lot of little speculators.

The Collectors

Vantage is willing to bet that a significant percentage of the comics that are sold are purchased out of habit. The image of the "Marvel Zombie" coming into a store and buying one of every Marvel book is one that comes to mind; while this loyal fan base seems to have been destroyed by the host of ubiquitous titles developed by Marvel in the past few years, every store is familiar with people who still buy every X-men

or Spider-Man title simply to keep up their collections. Collectors like having everything, particularly of a favorite creator or character, and tend to avoid (and resent) variant covers, chromium covers, and all the other gimmicks that are used to attract speculators and investors, since these marketing ploys simply cost them money without any return (remember that their goal is to collect all of something, and therefore the fewer comics they have to buy to meet this goal the happier they are). This is a vanishing breed, but **Vantage** suspects that they will always make up a significant percentage of the sales of a title. While they do glean some entertainment value out of their purchase, their main goal is to keep a title alive long past its day in the sun.

The Fanboys

They're still out there. They don't have many other interests. They buy specific books and read them cover to cover, over and over. They debate and discuss storylines, where things are going, the pros and cons of different creator teams, different companies, etc., etc., etc. They enjoy their comics, but they get their money's worth because comics are a chosen lifestyle, not just an entertainment form. They'll always be there, and the battle for their affections is waged constantly. They are the base audience, the one that shows up en masse at conventions to swarm. They are golden to publishers. They are entertained and grateful.

They're still out there. They don't have many other interests. They'll always be there. Comics are a chosen lifestyle, not just an entertainment.

The Speculator/Collector/ Fanboy/Soft-Core Porn Fan

Nothing in life is clear-cut, including the needs of comic fans. Most fans cannot be pigeonholed into one category, but instead fall into some or all categories. It varies from fan to fan, but here is how one fan might make his decision to purchase a new copy of **X-Men: Alpha**– *Hmmm– this* **X-Men: Alpha** *has a $3.95 cover price, and that's a lot, but I really want to read it. I really like the cool cover and I'd enjoy owning it. I really like the way the female characters are drawn in the X-Men books. Also, such an important book would be a nice addition to my collection. It would make my X-Men collection more complete. Plus, this book probably won't lose too much value – it might even go up – maybe $3.95 isn't too much after all.*

As you can see, the fan is complex. He has many needs, and a company that fails to address them is making a serious mistake. Fans do not live on entertainment alone!

How Does the Publisher Survive?

Some companies have clearly identified one or more of the niches listed above, and are working hard to mine them. Small independent companies are particularly adept at releasing variant covers, commemorative editions, signed and numbered books, nude editions, etc. While they may be doing so as a supplement to their underlying book sales, **Vantage** suspects that this type of marketing makes many marginal companies profitable.

Larger companies have a larger problem. The market share of Marvel and DC has dropped dra-

matically in recent years as other companies have developed alternate marketing schemes, and they have actually made some decisions that work against their long-term success (the packs of comics that collect previously-hot books and sell them for less than cover price has killed a number of otherwise hot books).

Marvel has undertaken a new risk with their line of 99 cent comics which feature their main characters with new stories, excellent artwork, and a low cover price that seems to be aimed at the entertainment market. At the same time, they are releasing several chromium-cover books a month that are clearly aimed at the collector/speculator, but they continue to make their comics available in the aftermarket in underpriced packs, making it difficult for any of their new books to appeal to speculators and investors.

DC Comics is apparently still trying to mine only the entertainment market, while offering speculators only "death and dismemberment" story gimmicks, and **Vantage** can't help but worry about the long-term viability of most of their line (particularly when they have turned over their continuity in a manner that alienates their older, more affluent readers). At the same time, the Vertigo experiment has reaped a harvest totally unexpected by anybody, and it is clear that there are still some people out there who will pay ever higher prices for comics that they consider to be of a higher quality than the normal comic full of hackneyed superpowered heroes. (This fits the fanboy description, but watch out if you try to apply that label to them!)

One other potential for survival is licensing – toys, movies, cards, video games, merchandise, and even food can easily provide more revenue than comic sales, and it may be possible to cut back to marginal comic sales combined with massive income from outside sources. Another tentacle publishers reach out with is alternative distribution, reaching more buyers in mass retail, bookstores, record stores, newsstand and mail order.

The implosion of distributors has clearly shaken up the industry, but companies who still think they are in the entertainment business had better plan a little more carefully.

The implosion of distributors has clearly shaken up the industry, but companies who still think they are in the entertainment business had better plan a little more carefully – demand for buggy whips fell quickly when alternative transportation showed up, and the competition from the ever-growing high-tech field is threatening to hurt comic sales even more than higher prices. Survival may be dependent on more care in defining the mission of the comics created. Most companies who want to be around in five years can blend truly entertaining material with all or some of the types of marketing examined in this article. By clever planning, a publisher might hang on, and even create worthwile entertainment to compete with 200 channels and fully interactive virtual reality. Or a publisher might like to define the output as a collectible, treat it as such, and create quick profit with no long term growth. Or...maybe buggy whips will come back in style.

X-Files ™ & © 1995 Twentieth Century Fox

The Truth Is In Here

THE X FILES

The Truth Is In Here

Stefan Petrucha Reveals All

"I don't know what's true," admits Stefan Petrucha, writer of **The X-Files** comic from Topps. "I don't know if there are UFOs, I don't know if there are ghosts. I imagine everything is true at some point in some way."

An irrefutable truth is that Stefan Petrucha has the distinction of being the first comic book scribe to have his work published in **TV Guide.** "Circle Game," a five-page X-Files story, appeared in their "Stellar Summer Sci-Fi Issue," dated July 15, 1995. Obviously, Petrucha is pleased.

"That's very exciting. I was very thrilled by that." According to Petrucha, the event was "an incredible stroke of luck. I believe **TV Guide** approached Topps. They had heard about the comic book, and **X-Files** was fairly *en vogue*, and they wanted to do something special for their science fiction issue."

"Special" might be an understatement. The success of the X-Files comic is rivaled only by that of the television show itself. Issue #1 purportedly sold out in one day, and the first two issues command large sums in the back-issue market. Topps has been taking action to increase the X-Files supply with trade paperbacks and second editions, but the demand remains high.

In addition to the ongoing monthly series, Topps released an X-Files annual in August and has a set of 72 trading cards due out in September. And if that isn't enough to slake the X-philes' paranormal thirst, the **X-Files Comics Digest** is due out in the Fall.

"It's 96 pages, same as the Disney digest," says Petrucha. Each issue will contain an original 65-page X- Files story, and will showcase the same creative team as the monthly comic series, with covers by Miran Kim and art by Charles Adlard. "The first story is about Bigfoot, a popular request among letter-writers."

Petrucha feels that the X-Files phenomenon is a result of a number of factors. "The charismatic performance by the two main stars; the design of the show, which is very intelligent dramatically – it's the Skeptic vs. the Believer, but they both have components of each other in their characters; classy special effects; the general topic of UFOs and the paranormal, which has always held a deep fascination for a large number of people; and the cross-genre storytelling."

But what is it that lifted the program from cult classic status to mainstream success? "It's got that unique quality of just being good, and I think in the end that paid off. I know that [series creator] Chris Carter had to fight a lot with the

Stefan Petrucha's long and varied career has included series that bend the mind, like *Beta 4*, and series that bend the funny bone, like *Duckman*. Here's only his most popular work to date, X-Files, proudly showcases his talents and extensive knowledge of the bizarre.

Fox affiliates about the show, but he still manages to produce a wonderful product."

Petrucha works hard to keep the comic in line with the television series. Not a simple task, considering that Fox rarely gives him any advance information about the show's storylines. "I get to watch it every Friday night like everybody else." When asked if he knows anything about the upcoming season premiere, which will conclude last season's cliffhanger finale, he replies, "Nope, Mulder's dead as far as I know."

Actually, Petrucha is kept abreast of major changes in continuity. "When the X-Files broke up at the beginning of last season, or at the end of the previous season, I knew that by the time the comic book came out that they'd be back together and the status quo would return to normal."

But does that status quo become restrictive when writing the comic book?

"No, not really. I think there's a lot of areas to explore. The characters themselves are interesting, and I think I've done some interesting work with their interactions. And there is a rich field of material that doesn't necessarily affect the main conspiracy story in the TV show, so I tend to head in that direction. I haven't felt particularly constrained yet at all."

Petrucha tries to pace the comic book so that the issues' release dates are concurrent with the television season.

"Plots are submitted to them very early on, and I imagine if I was doing something they were planning to do, I would hear about it. But schedule-wise, I've written up through December of this year, and I don't know if they've decided on scripts for that many shows yet, so it's a little complicated in terms of continuity. But we try our best to keep ourselves in line with the show.

"One of my big fears is coming up with a time text that's going to contradict one of their time texts. They'd be in two places at the same time."

Supporting cast members from the TV show occasionally make appearances in Petrucha's stories, but he avoids intertwining the two mediums.

"Mister X has started showing up. He's in #8 and he shows up again in #10. Lone Gunmen are in #3. And Deep Throat is still dead, so he hasn't shown up yet. He was dead before the comic started, so there was no opportunity to use him. If we do a story in the past, or if Mulder finds a video tape or something like that, there may be an opportunity to bring him back, too.

"I don't want to do an issue of the comic that requires having seen a particular episode of the series. I want to keep it so that the stories stand

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Petrucha works hard to keep the comic in line with the television series. Not a simple task.

FAVORITE EPISODES AND IN-JOKES

"I'll tell you my favorites and my least favorites. My favorites are probably 'BEYOND THE SEA,' 'EVE,' *and* 'HUMBUG.' *And my least favorites– They tend to disappoint me when they deal with classic monsters, so* 'THREE,' *the vampire story, and I don't remember the name of the werewolf story."*

In The X-Files #7, **"Trepanning Opera,"** *Mister X gives Mulder the final clue he needs to solve a mystery surrounding FBI Agent Drake: the name "Bierce," Petrucha's reference to journalist Ambrose Bierce.*

"I try to stick interesting names in. I don't really know why I chose Ambrose Bierce. Probably because of a story he did about somebody with a hole in their head. And Drake was a reference to John Drake from Secret Agent."

In The X-Files #3, Mulder uses the name Anton Wilson on a fake ID, referring to author Robert Anton Wilson, a favorite of Petrucha's.

"I like The Illuminatus! Trilogy, Schrodinger's Cat, *and* Cosmic Trigger. *Actually I prefer his conspiracy stuff to Umberto Eco's* Foucault's Pendulum, *and that sort of thing, such as Thomas Pynchon's* The Crying of Lot 49. *I think Wilson is funnier. He get's the joke better. So it was sort of a tip of the hat to him."*

"I don't know if Mulder knows Anton Wilson. I suspect he would; I can't see him not. So let's say it was in fact Mulder's in-joke. Maybe next time he'll be Umberto Eco."

alone in some sense." Chronicling the investigations of special agents Mulder and Scully requires extensive research into the paranormal. That suits Stefan Petrucha just fine, although his interest in supernatural phenomena is purely academic.

"My real interest is in how people believe, what they believe, why they like to believe things, and how the whole thing works sociologically, in terms of religion and how that translates into twentieth century society and technology. What's left to be strange? That sort of thing. I'm sure strange things have happened. It's a big planet."

Is Petrucha a believer? "I don't know– I don't believe that 10% of our population is being abducted regularly."

So what's really going on? The motto of **The X-Files** is *The Truth Is Out There.* What does that really mean? "It's that kind of borderlands between science and spirituality and beliefs that's really fascinating. These two different languages are both in some way attempting to describe the same thing: What is reality? But they conflict in really interesting ways. This is the heart of **The X- Files:** the collision between rationalism and a kind of mythic belief, which is one of the reasons for its resonance and appeal."

In addition to the many comic book stories, Petrucha has submitted a script for the television show to Fox. Stefan and his wife wrote the script on speculation shortly after the series premiered and submitted it through an agent. "It's currently in their office. I'm keeping my fingers crossed."

With the pressure of success to face, Petrucha naturally began to wonder if he would eventually run out of bizarre cases for Mulder and Scully to investigate. "I was worried about that for a little while, especially when I heard we were doing the digest too. So I sat down and wrote a list of topics that I could vaguely build stories on, and I stopped somewhere around 120. I'll combine some of them, so maybe it's down to fifty." Sounds like job security for everyone's favorite FBI agents.

The X-Files is not the first licensed comic book that Petrucha has written for Topps Comics. Before the conspiracy theories of Agent Mulder, there was the subversion of **Duckman**. Writing the adventures of the USA Network's duck detective required a different approach.

"For **Duckman**, I would just watch the episodes and drink a lot of coffee. And spin around a lot, I guess. Make myself as tense and aggravated as possible. It wasn't a research-oriented show."

Petrucha may have sought out "things to make myself outraged" when writing **Duckman**, but such things never came from the USA

The X-Files ™ & © 1995 Twentieth Century Fox

Network.

"USA never asked me to change anything. They really enjoyed what we were doing. I enjoyed working on it. It was a great balance with **The X-Files**, which is very somber and straight-laced–I went berserk with **Duckman.**

"My favorite **Duckman** was probably #4. I felt it was particularly successful. Gary Fields did a wonderful job on the art, and the color came alive. I was worried about the script, because I took some chances that I hadn't taken in other issues, and it just worked out really well."

Unfortunately, Topps has canceled the **Duckman** comic. "I think one of the reasons it didn't do well is because Duckman is perceived as a cute animated series. No one caught on to how subversive it was."

Other recent comic stories by Petrucha include **Nexus the Liberator** for Dark Horse, and **What If** #75 for Marvel. "It was 'What If Blink Had Lived?' from Generation X." Petrucha is also attempting to return to a couple of creator-owned projects from his earliest comic-writing days. "I'm trying to revive a series I did for First Publishing called **Meta-4**, and another one called **Squalor**. And I'm submitting some stuff to Vertigo, so we'll see what happens."

Lance Barnes: Post Nuke Dick, a comic that Petrucha wrote for Epic, is currently under consideration by the USA Network as a TV movie. "I think it would be a natural, with Don Adams in the lead."

And as for writing **The X-Files,** Petrucha feels that working with Fox has been a positive experience. "I think I'm doing some of my best writing, and I think they're appreciative of that." His simple rule of thumb: "If somebody's dead I keep them out of the comic."

I think I'm doing some of my best writing and I think they're appreciative of that.

Taking It Personally

by Len Strazewski

Lady Death™ & © 1995 Steven Hughes

The big event fizzles. The flavor of the month turns sour. It's no secret that the once-thriving market for super-hero comic books is no longer as lucrative as it was in the early 1990s. Even the television shows like X-Men Adventures and the new Ultraforce cartoon can't keep comic sales from falling.

Of course I'm happy to see Prime and Prototype, characters I created, starring in an animated series and it is very cool to see those characters as great-looking action figures. I even expect to make a few bucks off those licenses. But darn it, I like writing comic books. I like having fans read comic books. I even like having fans that collect comic books, but only if they read them first.

But there just aren't as many fans as there used to be. Comic book collectors abandoned comics when it became apparent that the character-driven big event series were overbought and would not appreciate in value. Many teen-age males, the foundation of the reading market, have also left the scene as increased prices forced them to make hard choices between video rentals, computer/video games, and social expenses. Younger readers find little to attract them as comic book art and continuity becomes more and more complex.

This dismal market scenario raises serious questions about the future of the comics industry for publishers, professionals, and marketers. If the market for super-hero comic books is failing, how can an alternative market be developed? Who will be the consumers that will drive an alternative market? What kind of products will capture the interests of those consumers? And most important of all (at least to me), what will I be writing next year to keep myself in the economic style to which I have become accustomed?

Like most comic creators who are looking for work during this market downturn, I've been pitching publishers on new projects. At times, I have had to stand in line to do so, behind lots of experienced writers and artists and hundreds of inexperienced writers and artists trying to break into the business. Mostly, what I have been talking about, though, is not traditional super-hero comics.

I enjoy super-heroes and I want to write more of them, but I have come around to the idea first expressed to me by Larry Marder, executive director of Image Comics and one of the sharpest marketing minds in the business.

"Comics are a major medium. Super-hero comics are a cult genre. The potential for comics is unlimited–but the potential for super-heroes probably isn't," he said.

I think he's right, and as a result, I think publishers need to look well beyond the usual stuff if they want to survive. Some already have, of course. Dark Horse Comics has always kept a strong presence in the alternative market and DC is certainly going in the right direction with its quirky Paradox Press. But mostly, all the major companies publish the same old guys and gals in tights. I think that's a terrible mistake.

Just between you and me, here are some of the kinds of comics I've been pitching to the major publishers:

Comics for kids. Kids, remember them?

Darn it, I like writing comic books. I like having fans read comic books. I even like fans that collect comic books.

Comics for everyone. With the exception of art spiegleman, few comics creators are willing to take on non-heroic or adventure stories in comics form.

There was a time when comic books were read by pre-teens and some teenagers, in the era before collectibility became a measure of quality. Today, comics are written for older teens and adults with high levels of blood, gore, grimness, and grittiness. I like senseless violence as much as the next guy, but few parents will buy these types of comics for their pre-teens. Instead, they buy violent video games.

However, this age group does read voraciously and what they are reading has some lessons for comic book creators. Adolescent serial novels like **Goosebumps** by R. L. Stine sell millions in mass markets. They are priced competitively with comic books, have wider distribution, and do not lean on years of convoluted continuity. It's time the comics industry started to develop serious graphic literature for this age group. I'd love to write some of these.

Comics for education. "Edutainment" is the hottest word in multimedia publishing but comic book publishers avoid using comic art and story-telling to teach anything but how to kick a villain in the groin. Some of the large publishers produce public service comics out of a "special projects" department and these are almost always heavy-handed moralistic messages about drugs, alcohol, sexual abuse, or gang violence.

Sure, those messages are important, but they don't boost sales. Comic book technique can be used to both entertain and educate, but most editors I've talked to seem afraid to work with educators to develop a blend of their talents. I get the impression that the editors just don't want to look dumb to teachers.

Comics for business. Thousands of Japanese executives learned their basic management techniques from a book whose title translates to **Japan, Inc.**, written by Shotaro Ishinomori and published in the U.S. by University of California Press in Berkeley (1988, $10.95). The book, in Manga-style comics, explains the principles of economics and the rules of Japan's acclaimed team-based management style.

This book illustrates the power of comics technique in simplifying and presenting complex information that appeals to a young, working adult audience–which is also the cornerstone of American industry.

Most people in comics don't realize that American employers are busting their heads trying to find good training and education tools that appeal to this worker audience. In fact, the U.S. Dept. of Labor now requires that employers that sponsor certain kinds of retirement benefits teach employees about the principles of investing, among other business practices, and since I harbor a graduate business degree earned deep in my sordid past and often write for business management magazines, I have been contacted by several employee benefits consulting companies about doing a comic book that explains pension plan management. I've yet to find a publisher who is willing to go in on that sort of project.

I recently pitched to several publishers a graphic novel about women in the workplace and such issues as sexual harassment and workplace violence. The project would be co-written with my significant other (or as I prefer to say, my "long-time sweetheart") Sarah Bornstein, who is a director of human resources management and graduate school instructor in the field. I received mild interest from one publisher that has a woman as editor-in-chief, but no commitment as yet.

Comics for everyone. With the exception of Art Spiegleman and his wonderful Maus series, few comics creators are willing to take on non-heroic or adventure stories in comics form. Science fiction and detective stories are a natural jump to graphic story telling and a few publishers experiment in those areas, but what about other mass market sellers like romance fiction or society scandal novels? Comic book technique can add excitement to any genre, as long as the story content remains true to the desires of the marketplace.

So far, though, with the single exception mentioned above, no nibbles from any of the major publishers. I think they're afraid to attempt something new.

What do you think?

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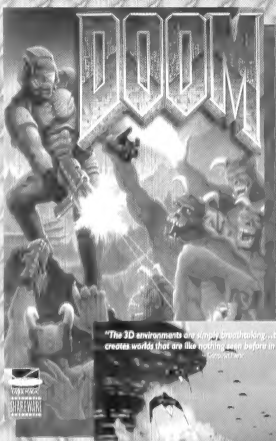

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